

Frequently Asked Questions



Consumer engagement can feel hard but like anything in life, if done well, the rewards are many.

If you plan well in advance, are respectful and inclusive, and most importantly remain open to the feedback of people with lived experience, your policy implementation will be more successful and impactful.

Here are some of the challenges we often hear from policymakers and some ways to overcome them:

How do I engage fully with consumers if I've been given tight deadlines?

- Discuss the timeline with your manager to see if there can be an extension

- Demonstrate why more time is needed to capture the experiences of diverse communities
- Consider various engagement methods (e.g., online forums, surveys, linking into existing community networks) which can be done concurrently with face-to-face engagement
- Do what you can with the time available, choose the right engagement activities and set expectations at the proposed level of engagement.

How do I reach diverse communities?

Start by contacting peak bodies, key community or advocacy groups that already regularly engage with or represent consumers from diverse backgrounds, or who engage with or represent a specific community you are trying to reach.

Why is it so important to include the voices of consumers from 'priority population' groups?

Health equity means that everyone has a fair opportunity to enjoy good health and to access the health services they need. Sadly, many people in our community (referred to collectively as 'priority population' groups)



experience health disparities. Any policymaker that seeks to improve health outcomes for all Australians should consider engaging with:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and/or other sexuality and gender diverse people (LGBTIQA+)
- people with mental illness
- people of diverse ages
- people of low socioeconomic status
- people with disability; and
- rural, regional and remote populations.

My engagement activity has stalled – what do I do?

Look to identify and address the reason. Common causes include a rushed timeframe, lack of clarity about the objectives of the engagement, not supporting consumers' health literacy needs, or not providing flexible participation options.

Previous engagement activities may have also reduced trust in the process, so seek to understand.

Ask the consumers about their engagement experience. Explore what might motivate or support them to be more engaged in your activity.

I'm not sure how to handle sensitive stories or conversations?

Recognise that, depending on the engagement context, sensitive topics may arise. Ensure an experienced facilitator can steer the conversations so consumers feel safe and comfortable during the engagement process.

Explicitly ask if people feel safe and comfortable to share, and acknowledge their vulnerability and courage inherent in sharing and listening.

Be aware that consumer experience stories can be triggering for the audience and consumers – look after yourself as well.

Implement and maintain safe story-sharing principles such as these. Offer debrief and counselling services after the engagement opportunity.

Should I worry consumers may not understand the policy process or context?

Consumers do not need to understand the intricacies of the policy process for effective engagement to take place.

It is your role to determine how their lived experience can shape a policy that best meets the community's needs.

What if I can't incorporate all the consumer feedback I receive or there are conflicting views?

Set the scene from the beginning about the limitations of what is, and what isn't, in scope for your engagement activity.

Always close the loop with consumers so they can see where their feedback has been incorporated or understand why certain suggestions have not been adopted.